

It was a decision that would set the course of his adult life, and Ethan Shapiro had to make it more or less on the spot.

In 1983, Shapiro was close to completing his master's degree in Russian language and literature at Middlebury College. In those waning years of the Cold War, he recalls, "Russian specialists had basically two career options: education or government." Shapiro was leaning strongly toward government service—that is, until a friend who had taken a job teaching and coaching at a private school encouraged him to do likewise. So Shapiro registered with a placement agency and went off to his final summer at Middlebury.

In mid-August, in between interviewing with the CIA and exploring Officer Candidate School, he got a call from the Fay School in Southborough, MA, about an unexpected opening in the history department. "I knew nothing about private schools, never mind boarding schools," says Shapiro. "But I went down for an interview, and the next day the headmaster offered me the job. I asked how soon he would need my answer, and he told me, 'Now would be a good time.'"

A few weeks later, Shapiro was teaching his first class.

Though swiftly made, his decision turned out to be a good one. "I worked at the Fay School for four years, and it was a great place to be," he says today. "I'm sure I learned as much as I taught anybody—about teaching, about living in a dorm, about coaching, about how to work with people."

He couldn't know it then, but over the course of almost 25 years as a teacher, coach and administrator, Shapiro has had to make thousands of swift decisions—a good many of them during the last six years, when, as Exeter's dean of students, his job has been (as *The E Book* succinctly puts it) "to oversee all aspects of student life."

"One of the major challenges for anybody working in a job like this is to be able to make decisions quickly and well," he says. "On any given day, 20 things are going to happen, and everybody—whether it's a student, a faculty member or a parent—wants to be treated fairly." The key, he adds, is "not to make many unilateral decisions, and to bring the right collection of people together to discuss the issue and agree on how to go forward. For me, this job would have been impossible to do without the incredible teamwork we have within the dean of students office," both the office's administrative staff and the other deans: Denis Brochu, dean of academic affairs; Veda Robinson, dean of multicultural affairs; Russell Weatherspoon, dean of residential life; and Melissa Mischke, associate dean and chair of the attendance committee. "Everyone works hard, they really care about the kids and they're committed to the school."

Shapiro joined the Exeter faculty as a Russian language instructor in 1988, after a well-timed year of postgraduate study in Moscow (during which he worked as an interpreter with CBS

News during the historic Reagan-Gorbachev summit). Once he arrived at Exeter, he quickly realized he'd found his home as a teacher, thanks, he says, to "smart, motivated kids who were just as interested in Russian language and history as I am." As an assistant (and later head) coach of varsity wrestling, he noticed the same level of "energy and focus" in the wrestling room, the same commitment to learning and improving.

Thanks to colleagues like Russian instructor and modern languages department chair Charles Deardorff, Exeter was also a good professional home. "Charlie was a great mentor," he says, "someone

I could always go to with questions about the material or Harkness teaching," and with whom he launched Exeter's Russian exchange program. Exeter would eventually become Shapiro's family home as well.

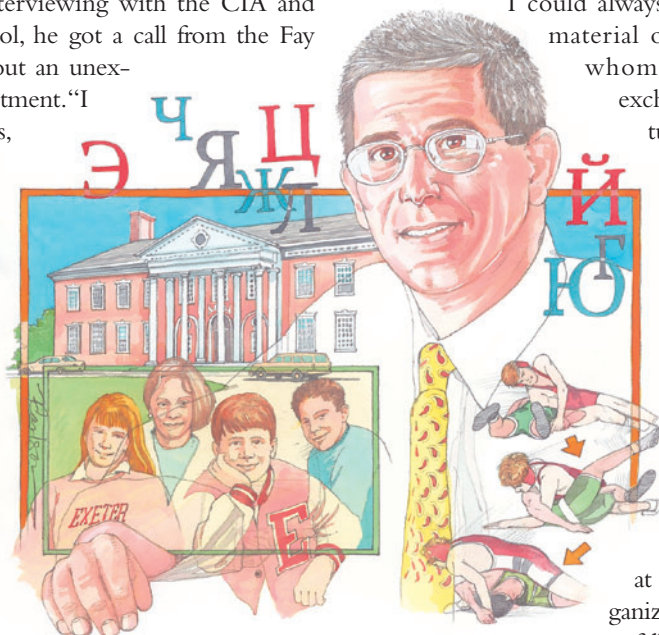
In 1994, he married an alumna, Tracy Dennehy '90 (whose father is varsity baseball and soccer coach Bill Dennehy), and today the couple and their five children live on campus within sight of the baseball field.

In 1996, Shapiro was appointed associate dean of students, a position whose primary responsibility was oversight of the discipline system—a job widely viewed as among the most difficult at Exeter. (As part of the 2001 reorganization of the dean's office, that task now falls to Dean of Residential Life Russell Weatherspoon.)

While disciplinary decisions are made by a nine-member faculty committee on which the dean sits, it was Shapiro who delivered those decisions to students and their families, and, he admits, "that's a hard, hard thing to do."

Shapiro's respect for school rules doesn't preclude compassion for students who run afoul of them. "Exeter is filled with good kids," he says, "and good kids can get in trouble and make mistakes. That doesn't make them bad kids. My role was to shepherd them through the disciplinary process. What I tried to do—and something that Russell does so well now—was to be thorough, fair and supportive, and to treat the kids and their families with respect." Again and again, he adds, "I was impressed and inspired by kids' efforts, in the middle of a stressful process, to learn something for themselves, to be straightforward and take responsibility."

Last year, Shapiro faced a significant professional decision: what to do starting June 30, 2007, when his term as dean of students concluded. He applied for, and has been appointed, director of the Summer School, and starting July 1 he'll spend his summer learning the ropes from outgoing director Doug Rogers. "Every time I've tried something new at Exeter, I've learned about a different aspect of the school that was really interesting," he says. "The longer I stay here, the more I've come to understand and appreciate. It's been 19 years, and it feels like five."



FRED CARLSON